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(54) **Tubular-frame structure for supporting surfaces**

(57) A tubular-frame structure for supporting surfaces comprising a supporting surface (12, 12'), a flat frame (13) and legs (14), in which said frame (13) is composed of tubular profiles (15) which can be combined in various

ways, characterised in that all the elements are joined through connection means which provide a firm and dismountable connection, constituted by devices (16) for coupling tubular profiles (15) and devices (17) for coupling tubular profiles (15) with a leg (14).

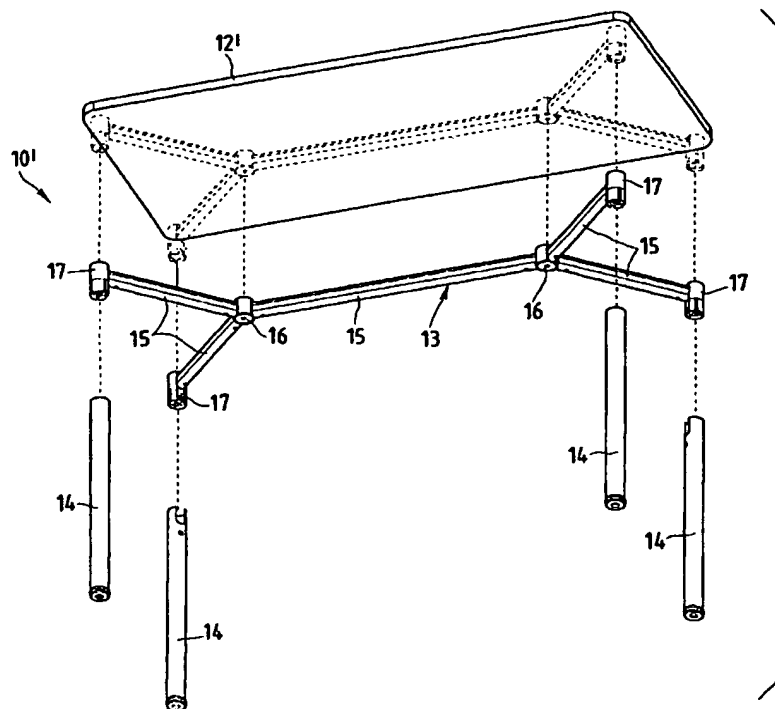


Fig.2

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Description

[0001] The present invention refers to a tubular-frame structure for supporting surfaces, particularly but not exclusively for the realisation of tables.

[0002] As is well known to men skilled in the art, the realisation of office-desks requires a lot of flexibility as to the configuration and arrangements of surfaces to combine functionality and appearance. Particularly in "open space" office applications, which seems to be an expanding sector, work desks are frequently positioned at an angle with each other or else in a complex arrangement.

[0003] The need to cut production costs and to also allow companies which are not specialised in making office furniture to offer a vast range of solutions which can satisfy the most varying requirements to its customers has led to the development of modular solutions.

[0004] For the realisation of work desks the assembly is widely carried out using a supporting surface and a frame structure with legs, which can be put together varying according to requirements.

[0005] These single components must allow an assembly which is fast but stable, to obtain a solid structure without the risk of deterioration of the materials used.

[0006] For practicality, tables are usually made up, to as great a degree as possible, of detachable parts to make transportation and storage easier, thus considerably reducing encumbrance.

[0007] The main drawback of work desk structures currently in use is that they are not composed entirely of detachable and standardised construction elements, which could be used in a whole range of finished products, but this does require specifically designed elements. This substantially reduces the number of different products which can be offered.

[0008] One field which is also susceptible to improvement regards, indeed, the optimisation of transportation of partially pre-assembled tables, which should harmonise the reduction in encumbrance of items with a small requirement in manpower for the final assembly.

[0009] The general purpose of the present invention is to overcome the drawbacks of the prior art mentioned above in an extremely simple, cost-effective and particularly functional way.

[0010] Another purpose is to allow a wide choice in materials to be coupled to realise the single elements of the table and of the structure without any technological limit to the combination of materials.

[0011] In view of the aforementioned purposes, according to the present invention, we put our minds to realising a tubular-frame structure for supporting surfaces, in which all the segments are attached through joints, having the characteristics shown in the attached claims.

[0012] The structural and functional characteristics of the present invention and its advantages compared to the prior art will become even more clear and evident

through the examination of the following description, referring to the attached drawings, which show a tubular-frame structure for supporting surfaces realised according to the innovative principles of the invention itself.

[0013] In the drawings:

- figure 1 shows a perspective view of a first embodiment of a tubular-frame structure for supporting surfaces, object of the present invention in which a plurality of attachable legs is schematised;
- figure 2 is an exploded view of a second embodiment of a tubular-frame structure for supporting surfaces;
- figure 3a shows a pallet made up of four casings for a tubular-frame structure for supporting surfaces, transported with a flat frame pre-assembled on a supporting surface and separately packaged legs;
- figure 3b shows schematic stages of the final assembly of a frame structure packaged as indicated in figure 3a;
- figure 4 is a detail of the assembly of a frame from figure 1;
- figure 5 shows the portion of the frame in figure 4 assembled;
- figure 6 is a perspective view of a device for coupling profiles carrying three sockets;
- figure 7 shows an exploded view of figure 6;
- figure 8 is a plan view from below of the device in figure 6;
- figure 9 is a plan view from above of the device in figure 6;
- figures 10 and 11 are partially sectioned perspective views of a device for coupling a profile with a leg;
- figures 12 and 13 are perspective views of the device in figures 10 and 11;
- figure 14 is a plan view from below of the device for coupling a profile with a leg; and
- figure 15 is a cross-section illustrating the behaviour of the socket (19) with the profile (15), through the beam (24).

[0014] With reference to the drawings, a tubular-frame structure for supporting surfaces in re is indicated in its whole with 10 or 10', and in the embodiments illustrated according to the present invention, comprises a supporting surface 12 or 12', a flat frame 13 and tubular legs 14 which are variable in realisation (figure 1). The flat frame 13, shown in figure 2, is composed of tubular profiles 15, which can be put together variably, and detachable coupling devices, comprising both coupling devices 16 between two or more tubular profiles and coupling devices 17 between tubular profile and leg.

[0015] The frame 13 can be assembled for each specific application to support angulated 12 (figure 1) or rectangular 12' (figure 2) supporting surfaces, carrying a substantial weight according to use.

[0016] In a first embodiment of the tubular-frame

structure 10, which has an angulated supporting surface 12, the flat frame 13 is composed of two parallel tubular profiles, for each part of supporting surface 12. The tubular profiles 15, positioned lengthways, are connected at their ends by tubular coupling profiles. From these end points also project the tubular profiles for joining with the legs 14, positioned at the corners.

[0017] In a second embodiment of the tubular-frame structure for supporting surfaces 10' there is a flat frame 13, composed of a tubular profile 15, positioned lengthways with respect to the supporting surface 12', from the ends of which project further tubular profiles for joining with the legs 14, positioned on the four corners.

[0018] All the tubular profiles 15 mentioned above are interchangeable amongst themselves for forming flat frames 13 of the desired form to support generic supporting surfaces 12 or 12'. The connections are realised through coupling devices for many profiles 16.

[0019] The legs used in tubular-frame structures for supporting surfaces 10 and 10' can be realised in different materials, possibly even in wood, of a generic type. The only restraint in this respect is that they must be tubular and adapted at their respective upper end to interact with the device 17 for coupling profile and leg. Such legs can, for example, also be used advantageously in other types of table, without a tubular-frame structure, provided that there is a suitable device for engaging with said tubular legs on the supporting surface of such tables.

[0020] The tubular-frame structure for supporting surfaces, described here, can be packaged for transportation in pre-assembled form, as schematised in figure 3a. Indeed, it proves advantageous in terms of a reduction in volume for transportation as well as a reduction in the time necessary for the final assembly, schematised in figure 3b, to attach the flat frame 13 to the supporting surface 12 or 12' at the time of production, to limit the final assembly to the simple connection of the legs 14.

[0021] The coupling devices 16, 17 are composed of a body 18, from which, on a plane parallel to the supporting surface 12, projects at least one socket 19 for coupling with the tubular profiles 15 and, in an incident direction with respect to said surface 12, perpendicular or at an angle, possibly even a connector 20 for the releasable connection of a leg 14.

[0022] As examples, a device for coupling profiles 16, with three sockets 19 radially projecting from the body 18, are shown in figures 6-9. Each socket 19 is suitable to be inserted into the ends of the tubular profiles 15, generally metallic and shaped complementarily, and attached rigidly to them to realise the flat frame 12 or 12', as schematised in figures 4 and 5, which show a portion of the tubular-frame structure for supporting surfaces 10 or 10'.

[0023] Body 18 and sockets 19 can be realised in one piece, generally metal, for example in aluminium, or even in plastic, having the necessary physical and mechanical characteristics to be used with the device.

[0024] The body 18 is moreover equipped to be linked solidly with the supporting surface 12 or 12', as schematised in figure 2.

[0025] The socket 19 has a non-continuous external wall 21, which, when the device is attached, makes contact with the inside of the tubular profiles 15 along curved portions 41. The wall 21 defines a seat 22, bound at the base by an abutment surface 42, which houses both a threaded operation grain 23 and a blocking means, a U-beam 24, equipped with a threaded hole 25, elements which can be seen in the exploded representation of figure 7. The external wall 21 can, moreover, be partially split into portions 26, diametrically opposed to the seat 22 provided that they project to form a bridge 27 of dense material in correspondence with the operation grain 23. These details can be seen clearly in the representations 10 and 11, referring to an example of a device 17 for coupling profiles 15 and legs 14, in which the socket 19 is sectioned in correspondence with the bridge 27.

[0026] The operation grain 23 is composed of a threaded shaft 28, equipped with a socket head seat 29 for actuation through a complementary key (not shown), an abutment crown 30 and a shaft 31, equipped with a groove 32 for housing a sealing element 33 in the form of a broken ring made of hardened steel.

[0027] The operation grain 23 engages in the threaded hole 25 of the beam 24 until the crown 30 can no longer move. The shaft 31, at the upper end, is inserted in a hole 34 formed in the seat 22 in the middle part of the abutment surface 42, until it abuts the crown 30. The operation grain 23 is thus secured to the socket 19 through the tightening of the ring 33.

[0028] The socket 19, thus positioned, is fitted into the tubular profile 15 of complementary form, until the end of the profile hits an abutment surface 35 of the body 18 in the position represented in figure 5. Access into the operation grain 23 is realised through a hole 36, made in the tubular profile 15, which is, in this position, lined up with the socket head seat 29 for actuation through a key.

[0029] The shaft 31 of the operation grain 23, locked in the hole 34, is able to rotate, but not to move along its axis. The actuation of said grain 23 causes the threaded shaft 28 to be screwed into the complementary hole 25 of the beam 24, which being locked in the seat 22, is forced to move along said seat 22, to place itself in an pulled out position.

[0030] Accordingly, the external wings of the beam 24 engage on the internal surface of the profile 15, thus forcing only the curved portions 41 of the external wall 21, opposite the beam 24, to become engaged permanently with the same profile 15 (see figure 15).

[0031] The tubular profile 15 can be separated from the socket 19 by unscrewing the operation grain 23, so as to take the beam 24 back to a position inside the seat 22 which does not cause interference.

[0032] The connection of the tubular profile 15 and the

socket 19 which is stable and long-lasting, which can however easily be taken apart is thus obtained.

[0033] The coupling devices 17 can foresee, besides the socket 19 for the profile 15, also a coupling system with the tubular leg 14. Such coupling systems can be of various types, such as for example threaded couplings, threaded-shaft nut or bolt-threaded hole, or else expansion coupling, as in the example already shown in figures 10 and 11.

[0034] The coupling device 17, shown in figures 12-14, is equipped with a connector 20 for releasable connection to a leg 14, which projects from the body 18 in a generic direction perpendicular or at an angle with respect to the socket 19.

[0035] The connector 20 is composed of an expandable cylindrical body, equipped with a plurality of notches 37 along the generatrix of the cylinder, which interlock with radial notches 38, on which acts a grain 39, which can be actuated through a key, which engages in a threaded seat.

[0036] To attach the legs 14 one only has to insert them into the connector 20 of the coupling device 17 being careful to line up a hole 40 which is on the cylindrical wall of the leg 14 with the operation grain 39 of the connector 20 (figures 4 and 5). The actuation of the grain 39 causes the expansion of the cylindrical body of the connector 20 and thus a connection which is stable, but which can be dismantled, of the tubular legs to the flat frame 13 to form the tubular-frame structure for supporting surfaces 10 or 10', object of the present invention.

[0037] The final stage of attachment of the legs 14 to the flat frame 13, as described in the example, is easily carried out at the time of the final assembly of the tubular-frame structure for supporting surfaces 10 or 10' at the premises of the end user using just a common socket head key.

[0038] From what has been described above with reference to the figures, it becomes clear how a tubular-frame structure for supporting surfaces according to the invention is particularly useful and advantageous. The purpose mentioned in the preamble to the description is thus achieved.

[0039] Of course, the forms of the tubular-frame structure for supporting surfaces, object of the present invention, can be different from that shown as a non-limiting example in the drawings, just as different materials can also be used.

[0040] Moreover, the frame structure was described as an example, attached to a supporting surface for the realisation of tables and desks. In the same way, in other examples not shown, the tubular-frame structure for supporting surfaces can be used to support generic furniture.

[0041] The scope of protection of the invention is therefore defined by the attached claims.

Claims

1. Tubular-frame structure for supporting surfaces comprising a supporting surface (12, 12'), a flat frame (13) and legs (14), in which said frame (13) is composed of tubular profiles (15) which can be combined in various ways, **characterised in that** all the elements are joined through connection means for a stable and dismountable attachment, constituted by devices (16) for coupling tubular profiles (15) and devices (17) for coupling tubular profiles (15) with a leg (14).
2. Tubular-frame structure according to claim 1, **characterised in that** said supporting surface (12) has an angulated shape.
3. Tubular-frame structure according to claim 1, **characterised in that** said supporting surface (12') is rectangular.
4. Tubular-frame structure according to claim 1, **characterised in that** said legs (14) are of variable realisation and material, and equipped at one end with a coupling system with said coupling device (17).
5. Tubular-frame structure for supporting surfaces according to claim 1, **characterised in that** said coupling devices (16, 17) consist of a body (18) from which, on a plane parallel to said supporting surface (12), projects at least one connection 19 for coupling with said tubular profiles (15) and possibly, in a generic direction, perpendicular or at an angle, projects a connector (20) for the releasable connection of a leg (14).
6. Tubular-frame structure according to claim 5, **characterised in that** said at least one socket (19) has a non-continuous external wall (21), which defines a seat (22), outlined at the base by an abutment surface (42), for a blocking means, bearing a threaded hole (25) in which is housed an operation grain (23).
7. Tubular-frame structure according to claim 6, **characterised in that** said socket (19) has a hole (34) which houses a shaft (31) of said operation grain (23) through the tightening of a sealing element (33) in the form of a broken ring made of hardened steel.
8. Tubular-frame structure according to claim 6, **characterised in that** said blocking means is a beam (24) which has a U-shaped cross-section.
9. Tubular-frame structure according to claim 6, **characterised in that** said blocking beam (24) creates or removes connection by interfering only with curved portions (41), opposite the beam (24), of said external wall (21) with the tubular profile (15).

moving in said seat (22) controlled by said operation grain (23).

10. Tubular-frame structure according to claim 5, **characterised in that** said tubular profile (15) is inserted until it comes up against an abutment surface (35) of said body (18). 5
11. Tubular-frame structure according to claim 6, **characterised in that** said operation grain (23) is accessible through a hole (36) formed on the tubular profile (15) inserted into the socket (19). 10
12. Tubular-frame structure according to claim 5, **characterised in that** said connector (20) is composed of an expandable cylindrical body, equipped with a plurality of notches (37, 38) and on which the operation grain (39), which can be actuated through a key from outside the tubular leg (14), acts. 15
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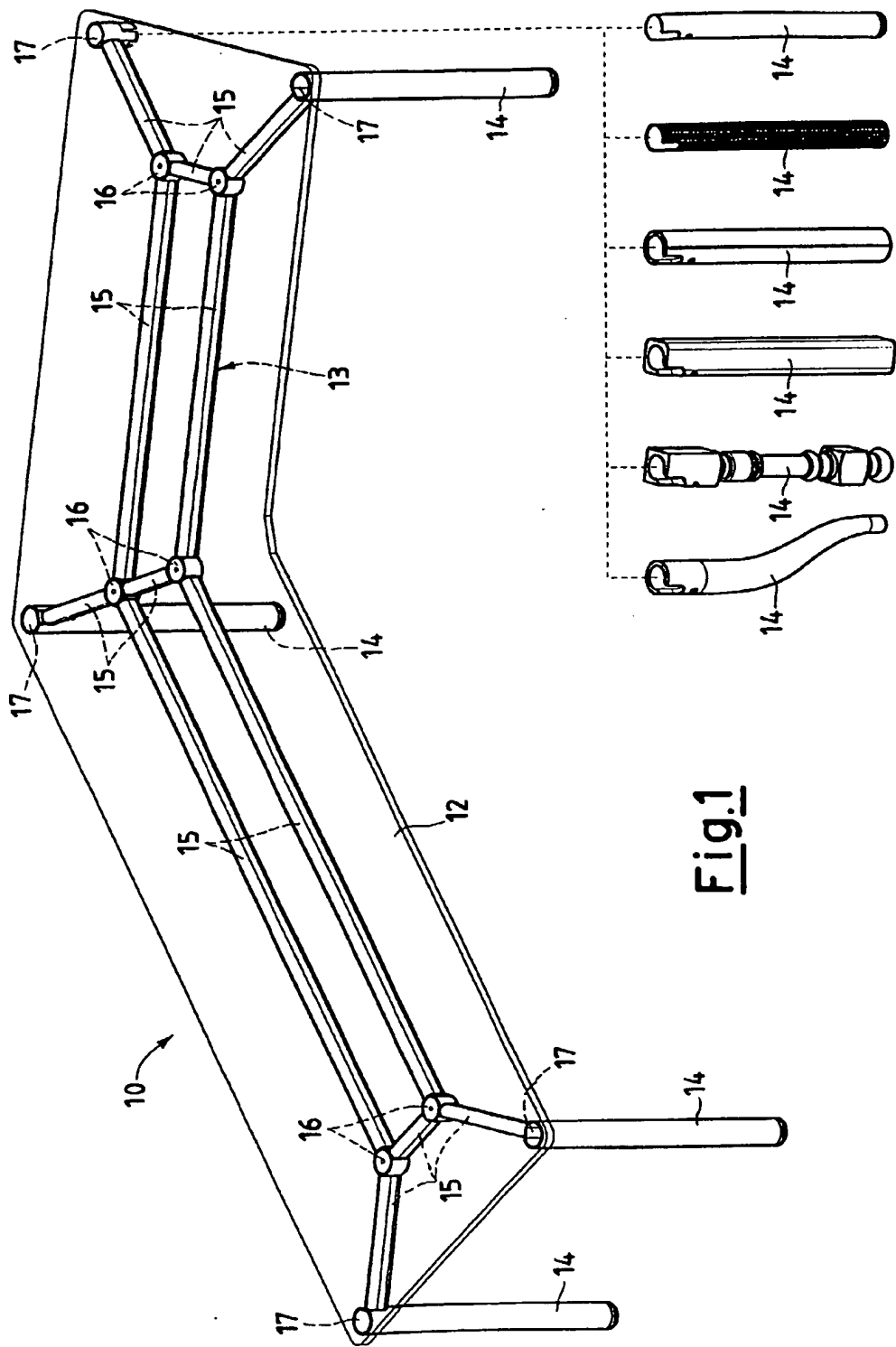


Fig.1

Fig.2

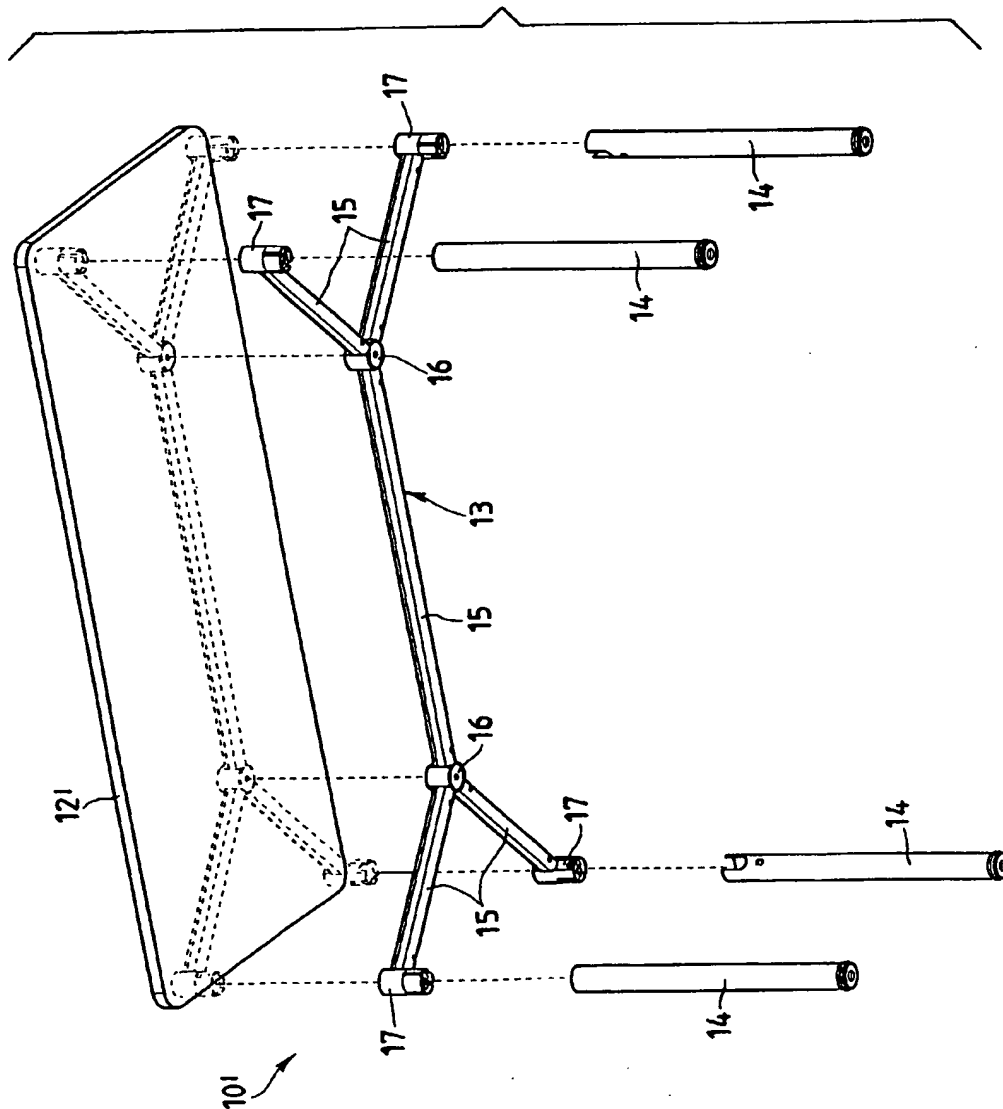
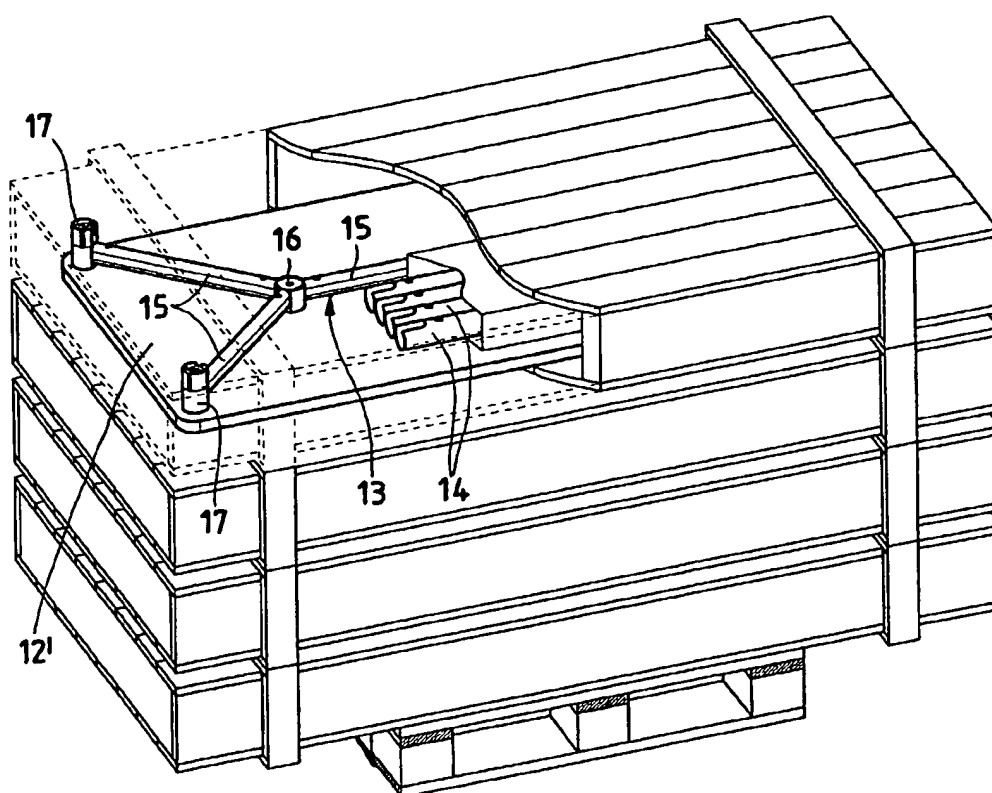


Fig.3a



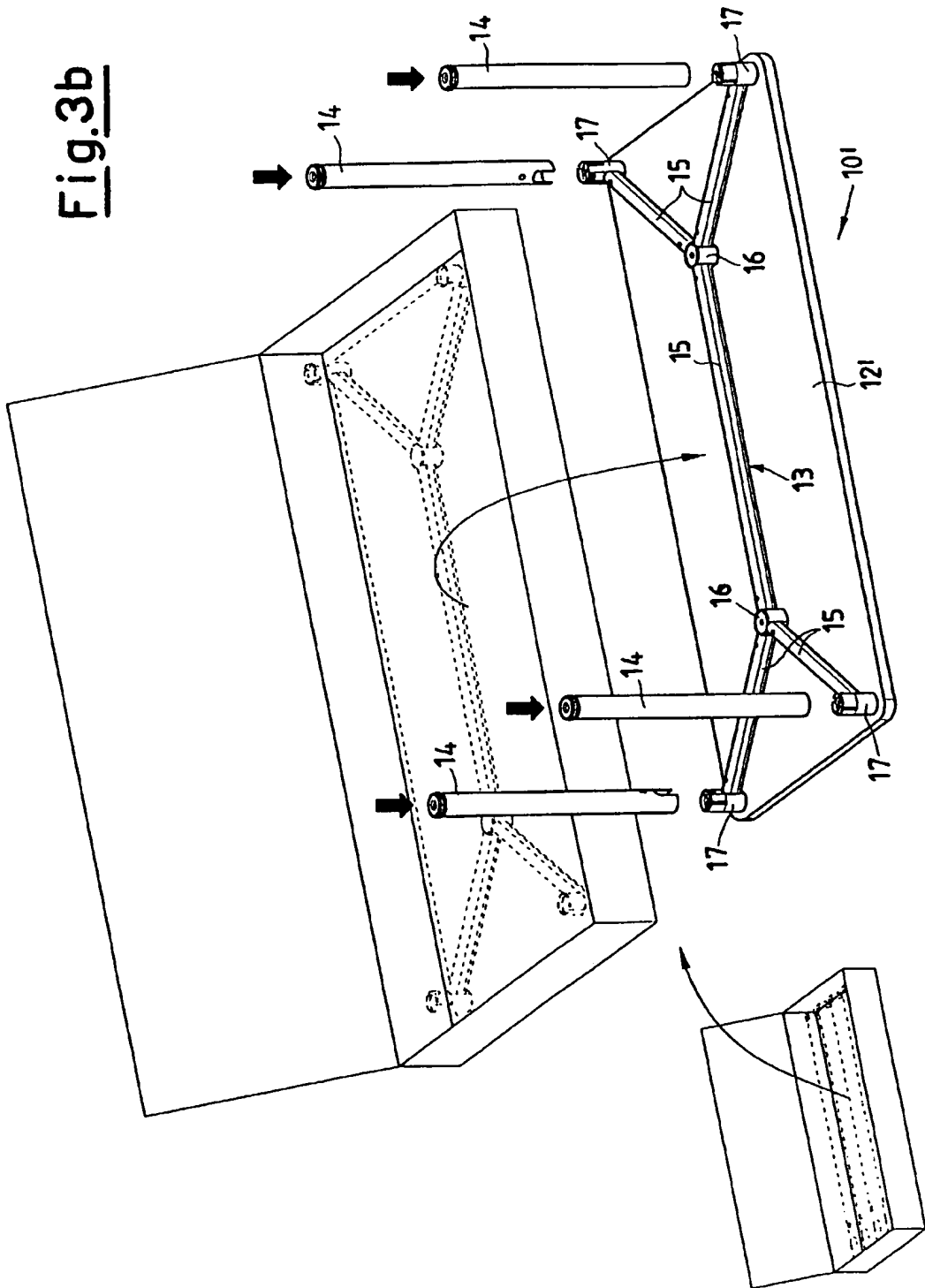


Fig.4

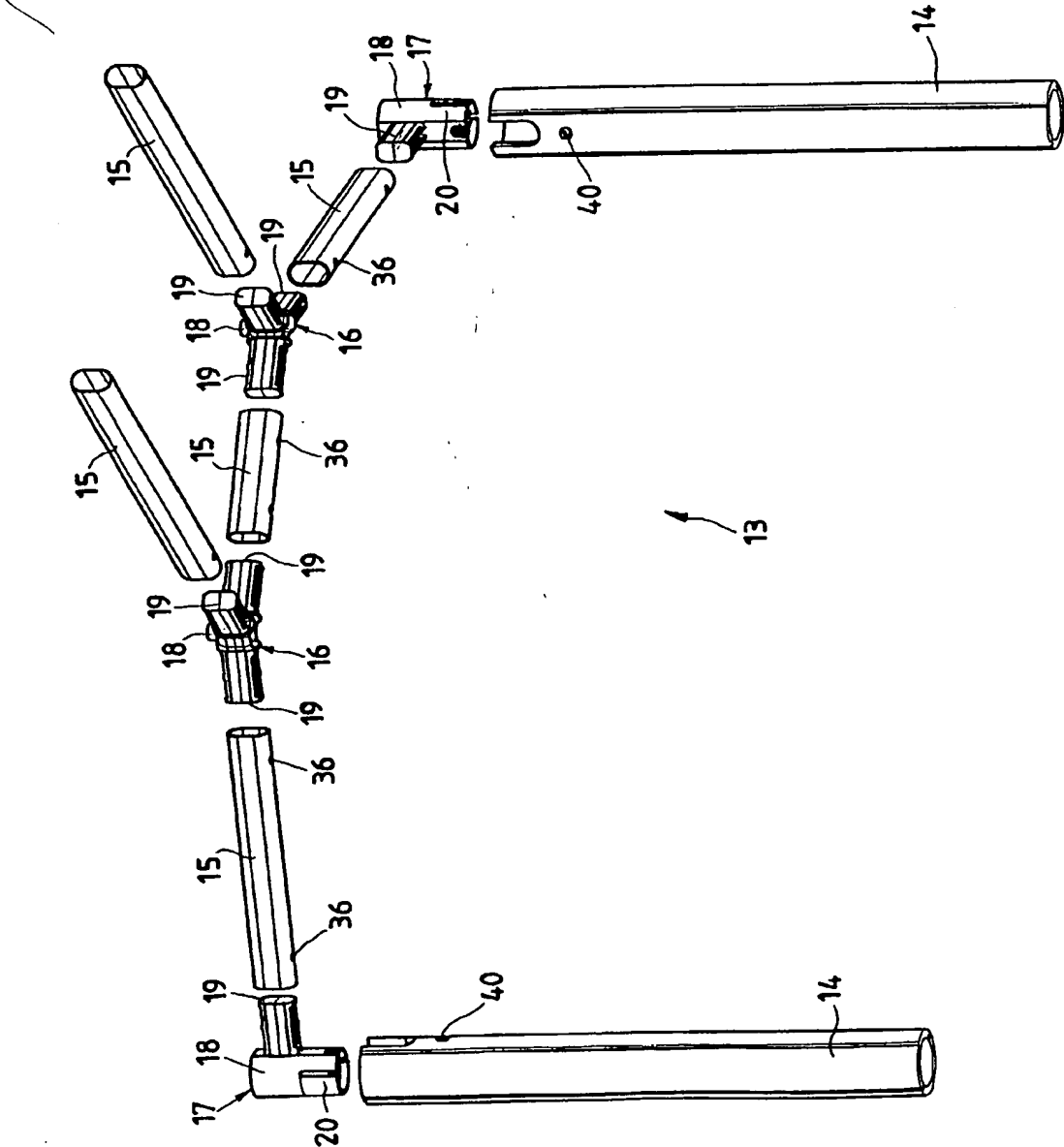


Fig.5

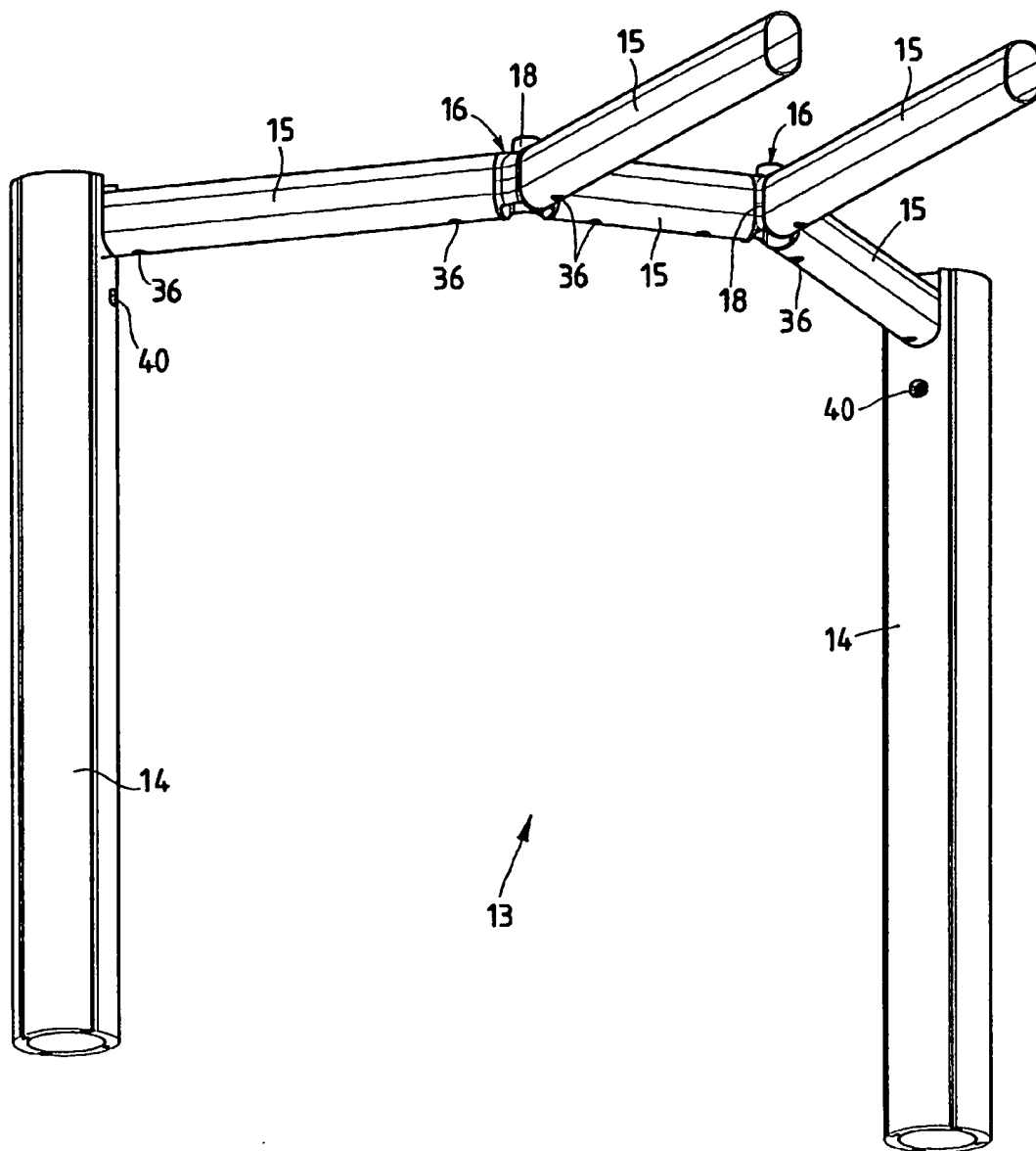


Fig.6

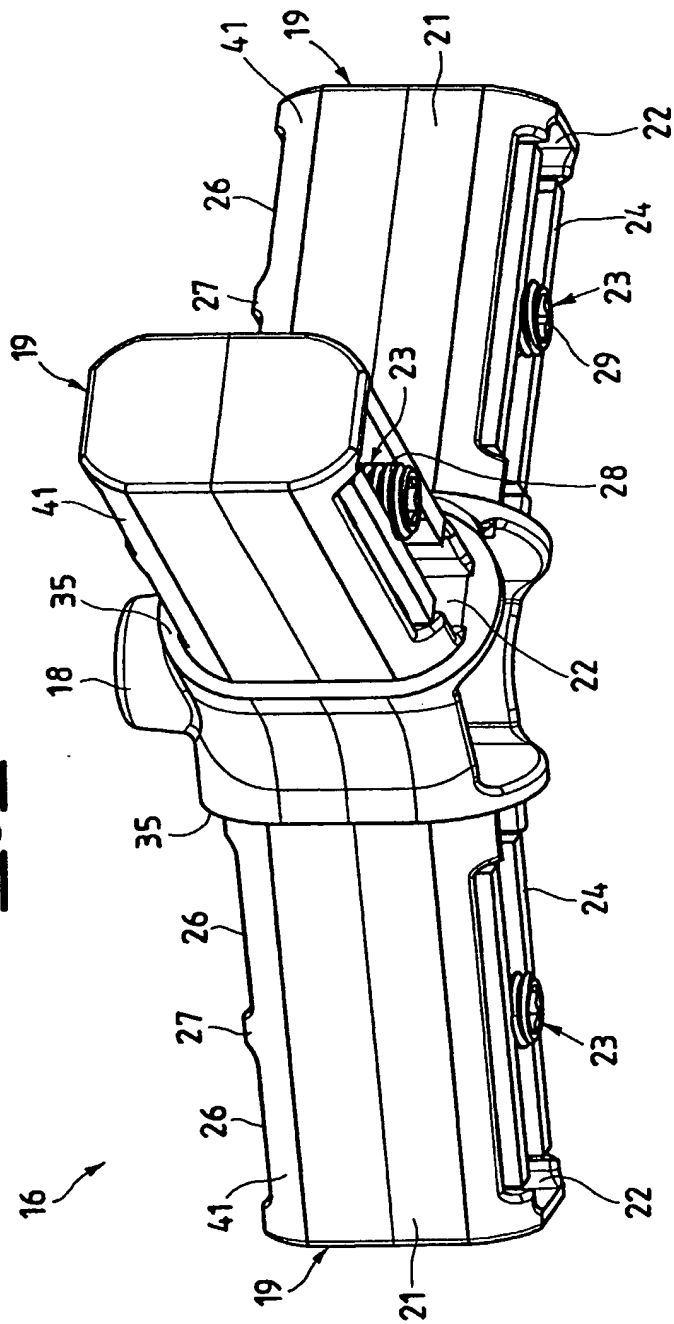
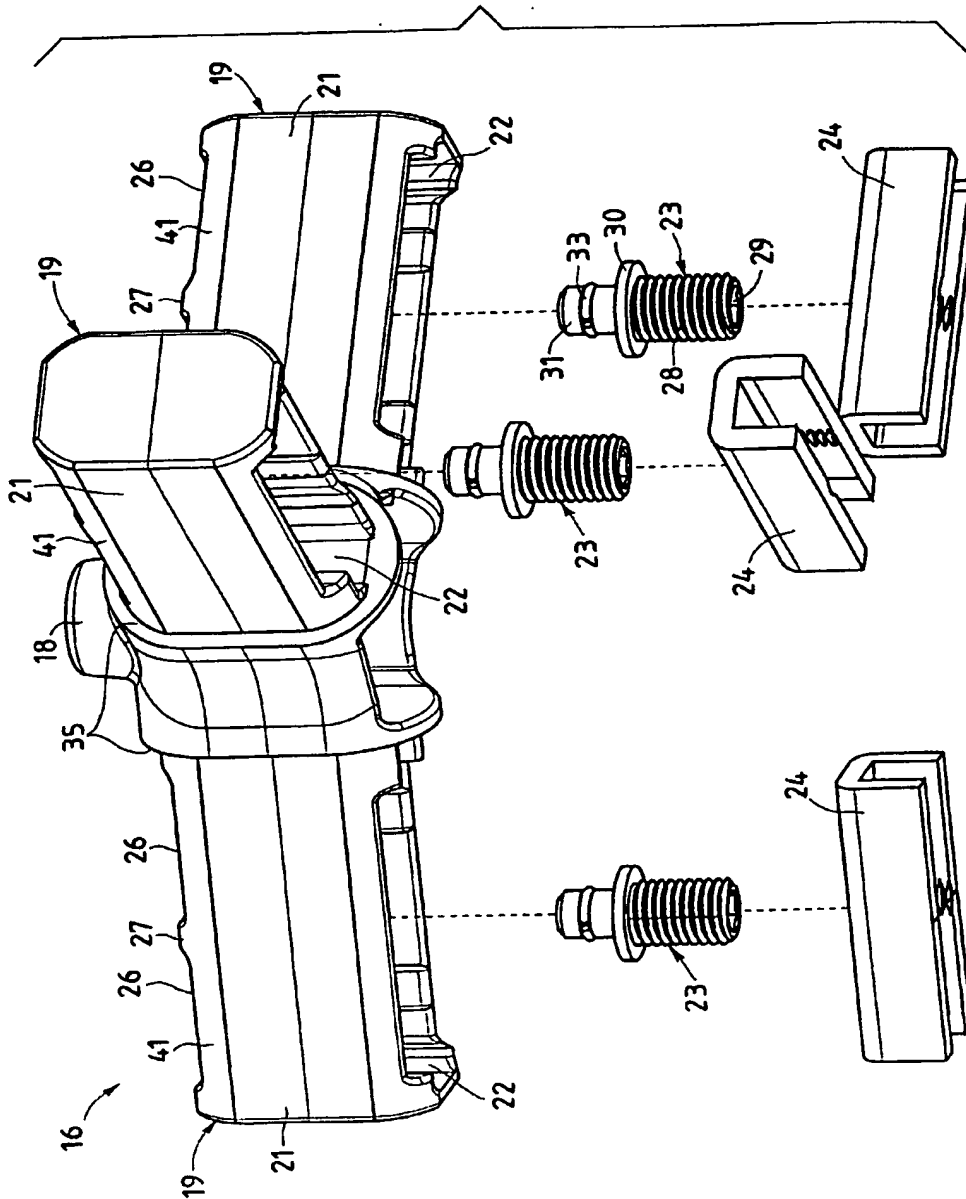


Fig. 7



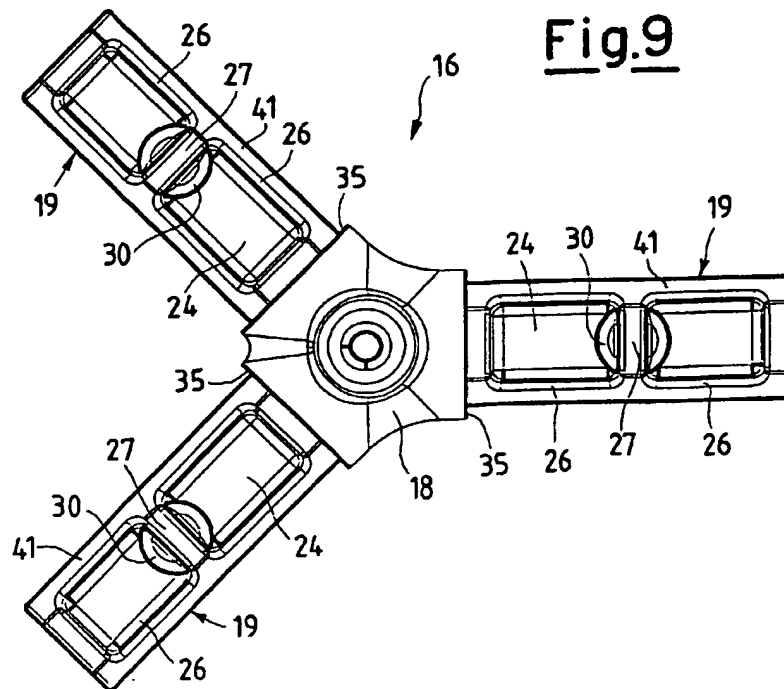
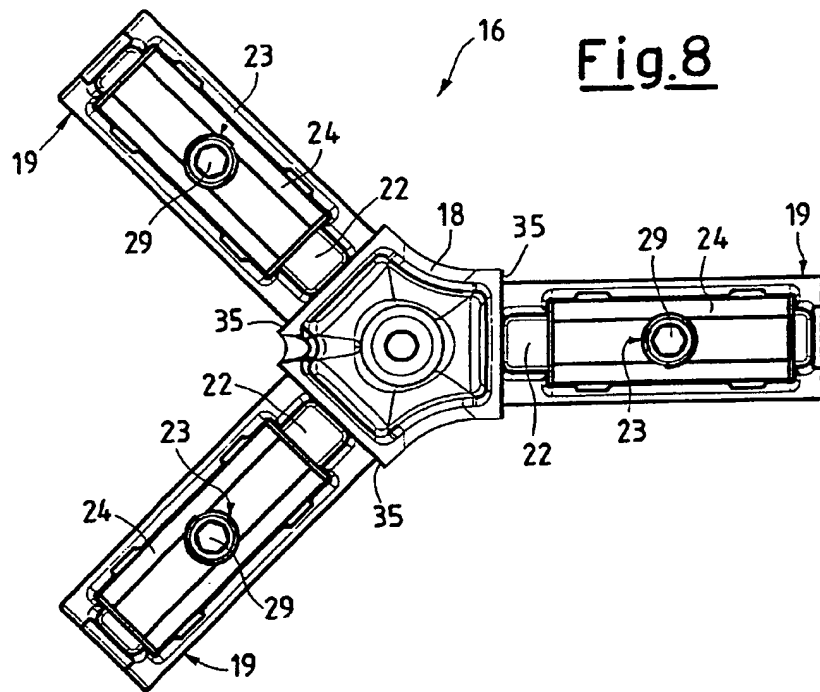


Fig.10

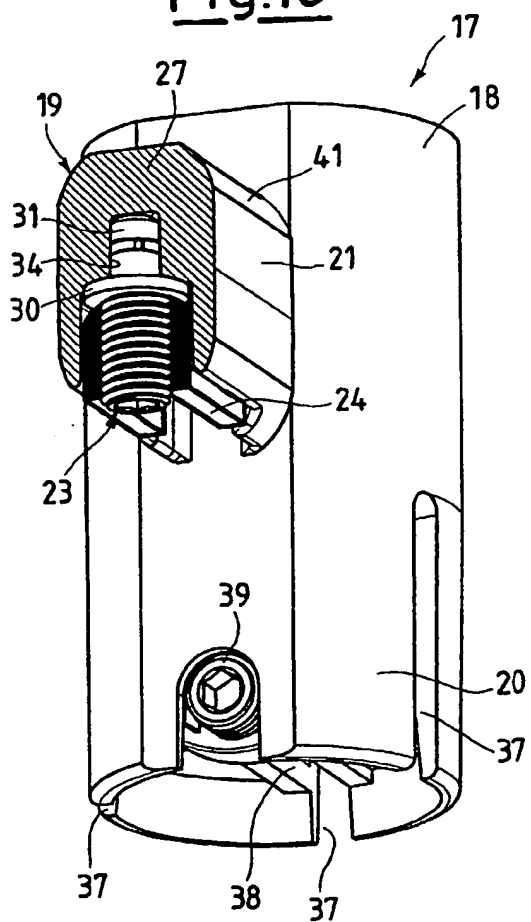


Fig.11

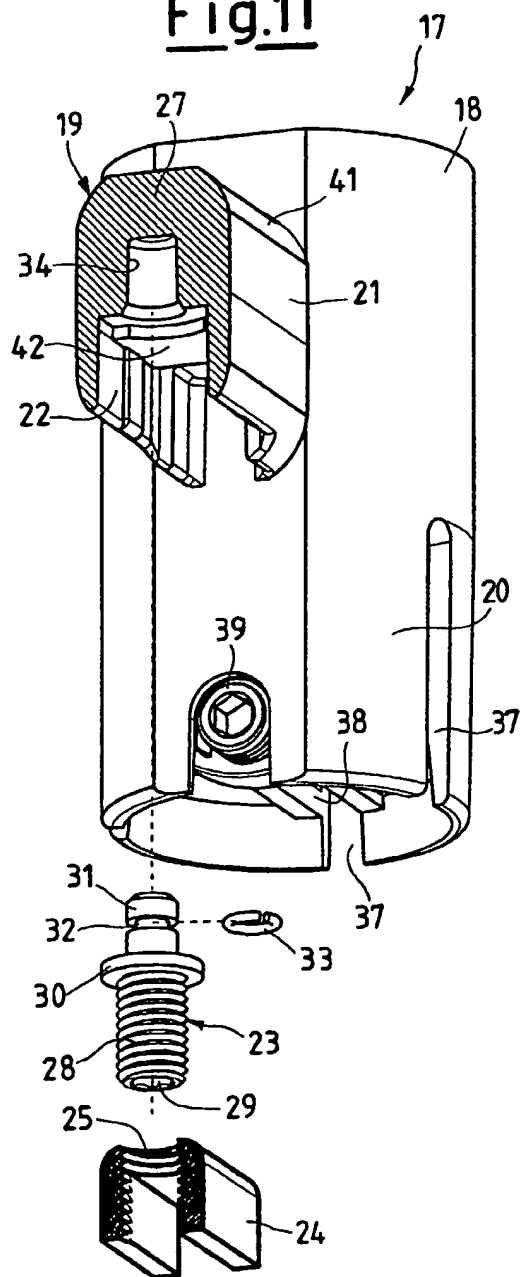


Fig.12

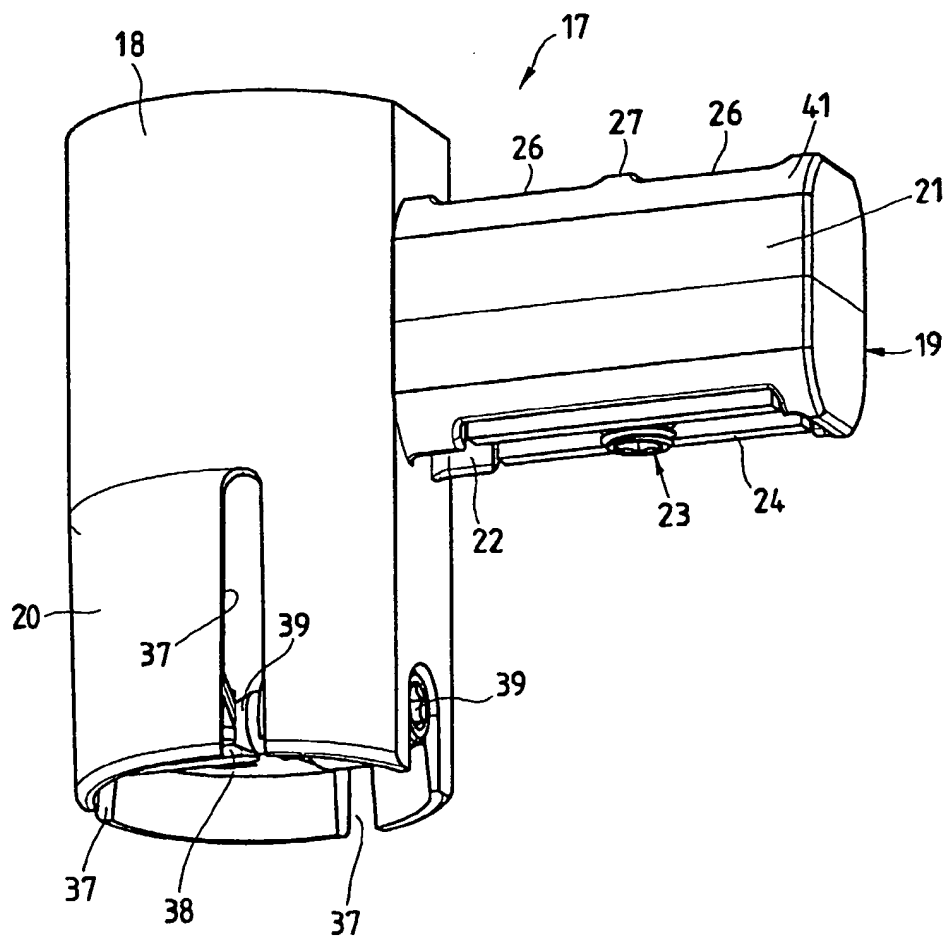


Fig.13

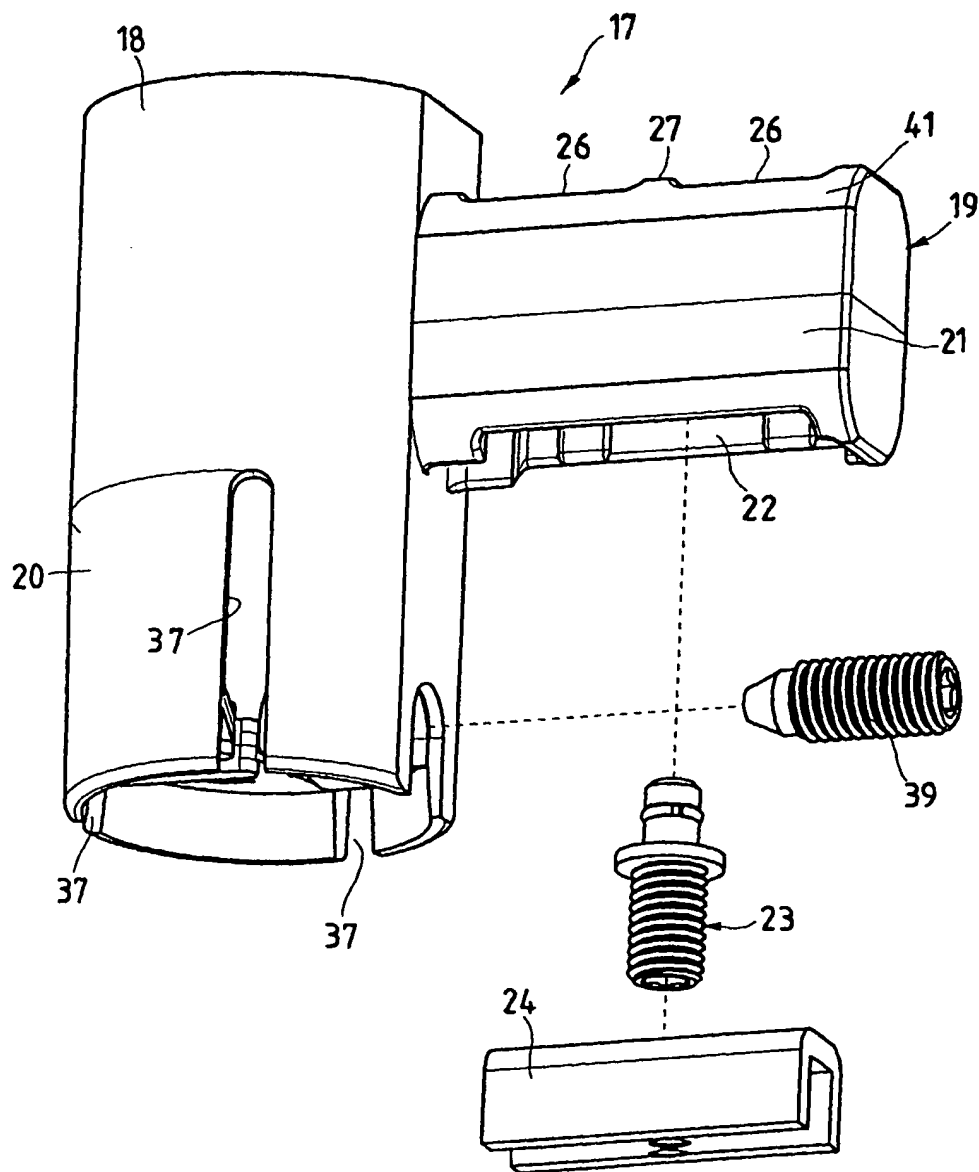


Fig.14

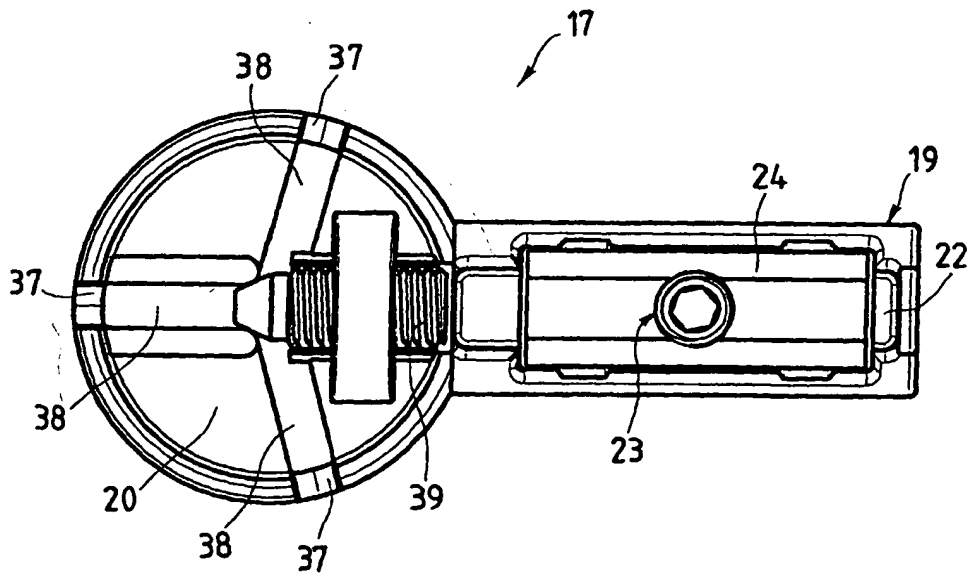
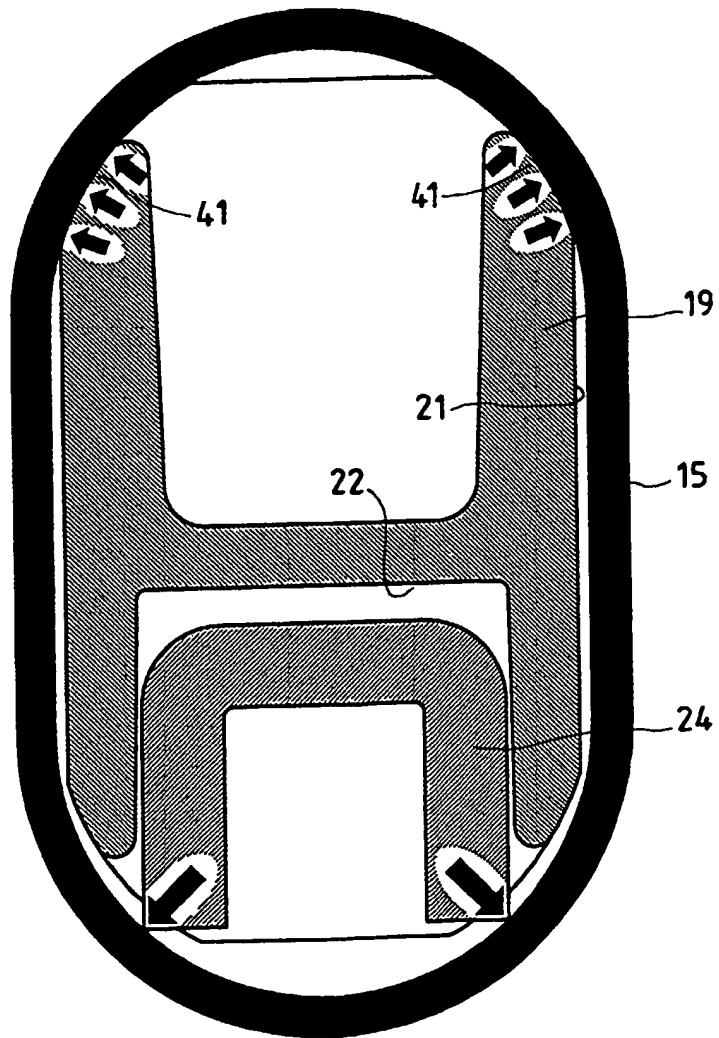


Fig.15





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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 02 07 5614

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			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.7)
			A47B F16B E04B
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search		Date of completion of the search	Examiner
THE HAGUE		6 June 2002	van Hoogstraten, S
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